Equality of Opportunity and Freedom from Discrimination

MHR Connections

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THE MANITOBA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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Conference impacts students

The Action Changes Everything (ACE) Conferences in Shilo and Winnipeg this month, offered just about everything – dynamic speakers, interactive workshops, human rights games and entertainment. And the students responded with appreciative feedback, including "a phenomenal conference", "Grace Kang is my role model", "the most important thing I learned was the Human Rights Code" and "I believe that change can start with one person."

When Grace Kang, a student from Strathclair School spoke, all eyes were on her, as the auditorium went very quiet during the ACE panel discussion. She told a story of humble beginning with her parents struggling financially. They worked minimum wage jobs, at first being too proud to accept help from homeless centres and soup kitchens. Grace remembered being evicted, living out of a car, and each of the Kang children having one toy each. And although she considered herself fearless, she sadly recalled how a man frightened her because he was homeless.

Student Grace Kang's story impacts students at the ACE Conference in Shilo.

Things changed for her and her family but Grace never forgot. She began public speaking, mostly on social issues and eventually was asked to represent her school at We Day Winnipeg in 2011. She spoke in front of 15,000 people and won a trip to volunteer overseas. This trip reinforced her belief that people are people.

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The Rights Connection
by Jerry Woods - Chairperson

During the last week of April, the Commission held workshops on the protected ground of family status and the rights and obligations of employers and employees. Both workshops were filled to capacity revealing a need to understand this protection under the *Human Rights Code*.

One thing to make clear is that the protection of family and marital status from discrimination has been part of human rights legislation in Manitoba since 1976. It is not new. Over the years, however, court decisions have widened the parameters of this protection and have given a broad interpretation as to the definition of family status and accommodation obligations.

So what happens when the Commission receives a complaint of discrimination from an employee based on family status and the failure to reasonably accommodate a request for accommodation?

If an employee believes discrimination on the basis of family status has taken place, that person has the onus of proving the family relationship was a factor in the allegedly discriminatory treatment.

After that the onus shifts to the employer who needs to show (and not by anecdotal information) that the discriminatory treatment was bona fide/ justified OR that what they did and how they did it was reasonable and would cause them undue hardship to do more.

The Commission will look at the evidence to find out if family status was a factor in the way in which the employee was treated by the employer and if it was, will review any efforts of reasonable accommodation.

As the definition of family status continues to evolve, including areas such as elder care and extended families, we anticipate new issues will arise. It is important that employers prepare themselves, and think proactively about the issues and have an accommodation policy in place. Sample policies are available on the Commission's website under "Business and organizations."

CASHRA 2013
Renewing the Vision
National Human Rights Conference
May 29-31 Halifax

Information on this conference can be found www.cashra.ca/

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T-shirts are the message

The messages of the Commission's staff and proactive advice of the many guests at the ACE Conferences had an impact on the students as reflected in one of the student activities. They were asked to put whatever message they wanted on white t-shirts. Some students were inspired by Flo, with one declaring that she was a "Ten". Others were inspired by keynote Speaker Dr. Samantha Nutt of War Child Canada. Her messages of "be informed, be prepared to give, change the way you shop and stop believing that what matters here is more important than what matters in other parts of the world" influenced many of the writings on the t-shirts.

Law day in Winnipeg and Brandon

Two of the Commission's staff met with the public on Law Day celebrations in Brandon and Winnipeg earlier this month.

Their goal was to help people understand their human rights in Manitoba as well as their responsibilities.

Pat Daniels fielded questions from the public saying the most common concerns surrounded disabilities and the need to be accommodated in both in schools and in the workplace.

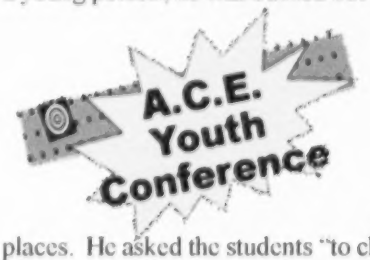
Over in Winnipeg, Beatrice Watson handed out human rights quizzes with an opportunity to win a prize for those who played.

Law Day is sponsored by the Manitoba Bar Association. It's a celebration of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms which was signed into law on April 17, 1982.

"No matter how fortunate we are, we are no better and no worse than other people," she said during the ACE panel discussion. "Every human being feels and hurts like another, and everybody deserves to feel safe."

Accompanying Grace on the panel was Teagan Pringle a student from Glenboro High School and R and B singer Flo. Teagan's dynamic message was to never stop dreaming. This pro-active young woman spoke about actively "looking for opportunities" to impact change. Teagan's work is inspiring. She is a leading member of the Rachel's Challenge Group and has helped with many fundraisers helping people in need.
Flo, both participated in the, ACE panel and later in the day entertained the students with a number of her songs, including Hateless, which is her anti bullying song and Ten which has been referred to as an empowerment anthem.

The following day in Winnipeg Flo was joined on the ACE panel by Dayne Moyer the Program Assistant with the Youth Peacebuilding Project and Andrew Chudley, Charity Co-Chair, Asper School of Business First Year Council.
In his work with the Youth Peacebuilding Project in Winnipeg Dayne works with youth of different backgrounds. As a young person, he was bullied but soon discovered the importance of community and a sense of safety and belonging. For Dayne, Change through Action has meant doing work to help others who find themselves in difficult places. He asked the students "to challenge stereotypes and generalizations held about those who are different."



Andrew, a recent high school graduate, has organized and participated in a number of charity events and conferences in Canada and internationally. Andrew told the students how important taking the first few steps to getting involved are, even if you are not sure where those steps lead you. For him, the first small steps were preparing posters. This led him to bigger opportunities like trips to New York and South America. "Find something you are passionate about, use your talents to make things happen, and reach out to people who can help," he said.

The Conference team leaders were excited about the response from both the students and teachers. According to Pam Roberts, students not only quoted guests but also the staff of the Human Rights Commission who were part of the conference team. "We saw students have fun and be excited about realizing and believing that they had the ability to make a difference and impact change here and now."

Law Day Quiz

1. What legislation protects your human rights in Manitoba?
   a) The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
   b) The Human Rights Code (Manitoba)
   c) The Canadian Human Rights Act
2. In what year was Manitoba's Human Rights Code amended to include protection from discrimination based on social disadvantage and gender identity?
   a) 1987 b) 2008 c) 2012
3. Is it acceptable to ask a person's age on a job application form or at an interview?
   Yes No
4. What is the most common basis of complaint filed at the human rights commission?
   a) disability b) sexual orientation c) religion

Answers: 1 (b); 2 (c); 3 (no) 4 (a).